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ABSTRACT

This document examines a retrospective study that compares the academic performance of students who entered the child and youth care degree programs with block transfer credit at two institutions in British Columbia with non-block students at the same institutions. The conclusions of the study were reached by examining GPA entry and exit scores between the two groups. The results proved that there were no major differences between the GPAs of graduating block transfer students and non-block transfer students. Furthermore, the data that examined the performance of the block transfer students lay to rest the concerns about these students' ability to complete upper level degree courses. A review is provided of the operation of the Child and Youth Care Education Consortium as a vehicle for providing integrated, multilateral block transfer assessments between the three child and youth care degree programs in BC and Canada. It concluded that the efficiency of the bilateral block transfer arrangements are themselves significant and this efficiency is multiplied when block transfer occurs on a multilateral basis within a consortium structure. Contains five references and three appendices. (MZ)

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A Retrospective Look at Block Transfer Credit for Child and Youth Care Undergraduate University Students

A project supported by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer

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A Retrospective Look at Block Transfer Credit for Child & Youth Care Undergraduate University Students

Executive Summary

This report describes a retrospective study that examined the academic performance of students who entered child and youth care degree programs with block transfer credit at two institutions in British Columbia. Entering and graduating GPAs for a group of block transfer students in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria were compared with similar data for a group of non-block students. Data were also collected on the performance of block transfer students in the Child and Youth Care program at Malaspina University College but it was not possible to access information on a non-block transfer comparison group.

The results showed that for both block and non-block transfer students the mean GPA scores improved from entry in the program to exit and there were no significant differences between the graduating GPAs of block transfer students and non-block transfer students. Consequently, any concern about the readiness of block transfer students to do upper level degree courses is not supported by the performance of students in the five year interval examined.

A review is provided of the operation of the Child and Youth Care Education Consortium as a vehicle for providing integrated, multilateral block transfer assessments between the three child and youth care degree programs in B.C. and colleges within the province and elsewhere in Canada. It is concluded that the efficiency of bilateral block transfer arrangements are themselves significant and this efficiency is multiplied when block transfer occurs on a multilateral basis within a consortium structure.

Introduction

Students entering a Child and Youth Care degree program in B.C., have traditionally come from a variety of human service college programs located within the province and across Canada. Consequently, transfer credit assessments done on a course-by-course basis were an enormously time and resource consuming process. In 1995, a block transfer credit model was developed in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and then later adopted by its two partner degree programs located at Malaspina University College and the University College of the Fraser Valley.

The Child and Youth Care Education Consortium was established in 1993 to coordinate child and youth care post-secondary education within the province. This collaborative structure has been recognizing block transfer credit across three CYC degree programs in BC for the past number of years. Through the work of its Transfer Committee, the Consortium assesses and assigns block transfer credit for child and youth care and related human service certificates and diplomas from accredited post-secondary institutions. Course outlines and program descriptions are carefully reviewed by the Transfer Committee and their recommendations regarding transfer credit are approved by the full Consortium. Decisions made in this manner are then adopted by the three Child and Youth Care degree granting institutions An integrated two-plus-two (diploma) or one-plus-three (certificate) transfer credit model has been used universally across the three degree programs. This has created considerable efficiency within the field in that transfer evaluations need only be done once rather than separately within each program. The model has also contributed to transfer credit awards that are standard across programs so as to establish a continuous and seamless career/educational ladder as learners move through the post-secondary education system.

The consortium block transfer model has been efficient and operationally smooth, but it was now time to evaluate its impact upon student performance. With Transfer & Articulation Project Fund support from the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer, this study was established to review the entering versus exiting academic performance of block transfer students

compared to students who had not received block transfer credit. The study addresses the question of whether block transfer students do as well as other students in subsequent studies.

Block Transfer

Block transfer is a process in which a block of credits is granted to students who have completed a certificate, diploma or some cluster of courses that is recognized as having an academic integrity that relates to a particular degree program. Block transfer within the B.C. post-secondary system has existed largely within applied and professional programs. In a document produced by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (1999), entitled *Innovative Transfer Models: From Theory to Practice,* it was noted that there were about 300 block transfer agreements documented in the B.C transfer guide. In this document, and a later one, *Block Transfer Handbook: Constructing and Negotiating Block Transfer Agreements* (2000), ten models of block transfer are described. The current study examines a system that integrates a combination of three of them:

1. The 2+2 model

   The receiving institution grants two full years towards a four year degree program, with no additional requirements so that students should be able to graduate in a total of four years.

2. The multilateral consortium model

   A group of receiving institutions collaborate to agree on transfer criteria so that a diploma that is acceptable to one member is acceptable to all members of the consortium.

3. The bridging model

   The receiving institution grants two years of credit for the diploma. However, students are required to take a bridging course of one semester to upgrade their knowledge and skills in areas where additional preparation is needed prior to entering the final two years of a degree program.

Child and Youth Care Block Transfer Model

The School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria (UVic)was established in 1973 and for many years was the only degree program of its type in English Canada. Consequently, students came to UVic from all parts of Canada to do their degrees in child and youth care. When a distributed learning (distance education) structure was added to the program in the early 1980s, students were then located throughout the world. Many of them came with college certificates and diplomas in child and youth care, but many of them also came with credentials in allied human service programs. This meant that an enormous amount of time was being spent by the School in doing course to course articulation assessments.

In an attempt to increase efficiency, an early block transfer model was developed at the School of Child and Youth Care at UVic. Upon admission, students with a college certificate were eligible for 6 units of transfer credit or the equivalent of 40% of a full year. Similarly, students with a college diploma were eligible for 12 units of the equivalent of 40% of two years of study. If these students had also completed university transfer courses they were eligible for additional credit. However it was evident that this system was not optimal for students who had completed child and youth care or allied human service credentials in colleges before seeking an undergraduate degree. They were not able to complete a degree in child and youth care in two years since they had not received full credit for their college diplomas because the transfer system was designed to favor university transfer courses.

Seibel (1994) did an analysis of the performance of 287 students graduating from the School of Child and Youth Care between 1988 and 1993. Of this total, 57 were college transfers for whom the mean graduating grade point average (GPA) was 6.4 on a nine point scale. The mean graduating GPA for the rest of the students was 6.2. He concluded that college transfer students performed just as well in their degree program as regular university students. This data provided the platform for making the case for designing a block transfer mechanism that was more equitable for college transfer students.

The School of Child and Youth Care developed a block transfer system that provided full transfer credit for certificate and diploma students from college child and youth care programs with a 'B' (GPA 3) or better average. Certificate students moved directly into the second year of the degree program at UVic and diploma students moved directly into the third year. Since child and youth care curriculum had been standardized throughout most of Canada and the U.S. this continuous articulation was easy to establish. However, many students came from allied human service programs (e.g. mental health, corrections, early childhood education, disability studies, family studies, etc.) where there was more variation in the curriculum. For these transfer students, full block credit was given for the college credential, but students were required to do some bridging courses so that they would have all of the core child and youth care courses before they graduated. These courses were available to the student on either a campus or distance format.

The full block transfer system was more equitable for college transfer students and was certainly more efficient for faculty and staff in the School since transcripts were not having to be assessed on a course by course basis.

The Child and Youth Care Education Consortium: A Multilateral Mechanism for Block Transfer Credit

The British Columbia Child and Youth Care Education Consortium was established in 1993 as a structure to coordinate child and youth care post-secondary education within the province. The Consortium has representation from all university and college programs in B.C. that provide child and youth care education at certificate, diploma and degree levels, as well as members from private sector training programs, professional associations, employer federations, and the government. There is a Transfer Committee within the Consortium that does the transcript evaluations necessary for establishing block transfer credit arrangements between sending college programs throughout Canada and the three receiving degree programs in B.C. There is also a Curriculum Committee operating within the Consortium that works at keeping curriculum consistent and integrated across diploma and degree child and youth care programs in the province.

Functions:

The primary functions of the Child and Youth Care Education Consortium are as follows:

1. The development, coordination and evaluation of core curriculum for Child and Youth Care post-secondary education in British Columbia.

2. The provision of long range planning regarding Child and Youth Care education in the province.

3. The standardization of admission, transfer credit and prior learning assessment processes across Child and Youth Care education programs in B.C.

4. The provision of a forum to ensure educational consistency and quality through comparable program standards.

5. The operation of a collaborative structure to respond to transfer credit requests in a manner that is consistent across programs.

6. The existence of a single point of contact for a unified voice on issues relating to Child and Youth Care education.

Integrated Block Transfer Model

Through the work of its Transfer Committee, the Consortium assesses and assigns block transfer credit for child and youth care and related human service certificates and diplomas from accredited post-secondary institutions. Course outlines and program descriptions are carefully reviewed by the Transfer Committee and their recommendations regarding transfer credit are approved by the full Consortium. Decisions made in this manner are then jointly adopted by the three Child and Youth Care degree granting institutions in the province. Since 1995 an integrated two-plus-two (diploma) and one-plus-three (certificate) transfer credit model has been adopted

universally across the Consortium. Using this model, articulation agreements have been developed with Child and Youth Care educational programs throughout B.C. as well as in other provinces. With support from the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer a website was established for the Consortium on which details regarding transfer credit arrangements are provided (see Appendix A).

The efficiencies noted in a bilateral block transfer model are increased significantly in a multilateral model such as operates within the Consortium. Requests from colleges for an articulation agreement come to a central point where they are examined collectively by the member institutions of the Consortium. The agreement then exists for all three degree granting programs in B.C. This means that the colleges don't need to go through the process of establishing three separate agreements, the curriculum does not need to be assessed by each of the three degree programs, and the articulation agreement is the same with each of them.

Readiness of Block Transfer Students for Advanced Study

As noted in another British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer document, *Block Transfer in the BC Post-Secondary System* (Finlay, 1997, p.4), "an important question in regards to articulation-related transfer issues revolves around whether or not transfer students are adequately prepared for upper division coursework at university". In instances where transfer credit has not been awarded on the basis of a course to course assessment but, rather, on a block basis the question of student readiness for continued study becomes even more pressing.

The present study was designed to examine the performance of child and youth care students who received block transfer credit compared to a group of students who had not in order to address the concern held by some that block transfer students may be less ready to handle upper level undergraduate coursework. The original intention was to examine all child and youth care students who graduated from the three degree granting programs in B.C. subsequent to the block transfer system being in place. However, upon closer examination, it was not feasible to collect data on the graduates of all three degree-granting institutions for a couple of reasons. The first was that there were not the resources available to collect this amount of data. The second reason

was that the student record systems across three institutions were not similar so that the same information was not always available. Consequently, it was decided to just look at data from UVic and Malaspina University College (MUC).

Due to differences in administrative systems, data collection across just two institutions was more difficult than anticipated. This is a common problem noted in other research projects of this nature. For a more complete look at the difficulties encountered in cross-institutional data collection please see *Assessment of PLA student success: Retrospective study* (2002).

Method

Data were collected first at the University of Victoria. Records were reviewed of students in the School of Child and Youth Care between 1995 and 2000 who had entered the program with block transfer credit. The GPAs of these students as they entered the program were recorded as well as the GPAs when they graduated. Similar data were collected over the same time interval on a group of students in the program who had entered without block transfer credit. A repeated measures statistical analysis was completed on the data collected and then the project moved on to collecting the next data set.

A number of unexpected difficulties were encountered at Malaspina University College where it was discovered that the information being collected in the project did not exist on the computer records system there. This meant that the records of child and youth care students in the program between 1995 and 2000 had to be reviewed manually. This process was so laborious that it was not possible to collect data on a comparison group of students who had entered the program at MUC without block transfer credit. After a prolonged period of manual record review the data on block transfer students was finally completed and a statistical analysis performed on the data.

Results

University of Victoria

The primary objective of this analysis was to examine GPA entry and exit scores for a block transfer group and a non-block transfer group of students in the School of Child and Youth Care at UVic.

A General Linear Model (GLM) repeated measures analysis was conducted on a sample (n = 110) of students, a block transfer group (group 1, n = 44), and a non-block transfer group (group 2, n = 66), using GPA scores calculated at Time 1 (program entry) and Time 2 (program exit), to observe how both groups performed over time.

For the data analyses, within-subjects factors (dependent variables) were the GPA measures at Time 1 and Time 2, and the between-subjects factors were the 2 group variables. The number of years needed to complete the program was used as a co-variate in the data analysis to examine whether there was a relationship between changes in GPA measures and the length of time students took to complete their degrees. Group 1 and group 2 Mean GPA scores are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean GPA scores for block & non-block transfer groups.

	Time 1 (program entry)	Time 2 (program exit)
Group 1 (block transfer)	6.26	6.63
Group 2 (non-block transfer)	5.96	6.83

Within-subject results. To statistically evaluate the pattern of change in GPA scores, we computed a group x occasion repeated measures GLM analysis. The multivariate tests of within-subjects effects yielded no significant effects for the 'time' x 'years in program' interaction (p=.759), although the 'time' x 'group' interaction effect (p=.061) was approaching significance at the .05 level.

Figure 1 (see Appendix B) illustrates the relationship between performance (GPA) and occasion (time) for the two groups of students. Performance differences were evidenced within both groups, with some students showing improvement in their GPA scores, while others did not improve. In both the block transfer and non-block transfer groups, an increase in mean GPA scores from Time 1 to Time 2 was evidenced overall, however, the difference between the two groups did not reach statistical significance.

Between-subject results. The associated between-subjects effects for the repeated measures analysis yielded no significant differences. The 'time' x 'group' interaction was not affected by the number of years in the program. The average length of time in the program was 2.71years.

Malaspina University College

This analysis examined the score-related change in performance of block transfer students on entry to the program and at exit. The sample of students (n = 69) attended the Child and Youth Care Program at the Malaspina University College .Unfortunately, it was not possible to have a comparison group of students who did not receive block transfer credit. The entry and exit GPA % scores were compared to observe performance over time. The number of years in the program was used as a co-variate in the data analyses, with the average length of time in the program calculated to be 2.32 years. The mean GPA % score for Time 1 and Time 2 were calculated to be 82.15 and 82.67 respectively.

Within-subjects results. Multivariate tests, using the GLM repeated measures analysis yielded no significant results in the 'time' x 'years in program' interaction. There was a negative correlation between 'GPA % score' and 'years in program' at both Time 1 (-.031) and Time 2 (-.102); however, neither of these correlations approached significance. Figure 2 (see Appendix C) suggests an overall improvement in mean GPA % scores from Time 1 to Time 2, however, again the results do not approach significance at the .05 level.

Discussion

When the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria proposed a full block transfer model for students from college certificate and diploma programs in professional and applied areas, there was some hesitation on the part of the Senate in giving approval to proceed. Some of this hesitation was predicated upon traditionally held views of the fundamental differences between colleges and universities. Related to this was a concern that students entering a university program with full block transfer credit may not be adequately prepared to effectively manage the coursework in the upper years of the program. However, the School of Child and Youth Care made the argument that curriculum development in the child and youth care field had been guided by an integrated educational template that created an articulated ladder linking all post-secondary programs. As a result, there should not be gaps in the learning of students transferring from colleges to the university program. The block transfer proposal was approved with the understanding that an evaluation of the performance of transferring students be done after five years of operation.

The present study contains data collected on the academic performance of UVic block transfer students from 1995 to 2000 compared to a group of non-block transfer students. The results show that for both groups the mean GPA scores improve from entry in the program to exit. There are no significant differences between the graduating GPAs of block transfer students and non-block transfer students. Consequently, the concern about the readiness of block transfer students to do upper level degree courses is not supported by the performance of students in the five year interval examined.

Data were also collected in the partner child and youth care degree program at Malaspina University College. The results also show a performance improvement in block transfer MUC students from entry to exit in the child and youth care program. Unfortunately data on a non-block transfer group were not available but the characteristics of the block transfer data look very similar to the UVic group. So, on the basis of the analysis of the complete data set from

the University of Victoria, supported partially by the incomplete MUC data, it is reasonable to conclude that the performance of students moving from college programs to a child and youth care university degree is not compromised by block transfer credit.

It is interesting to note that similar concerns have recently arisen in regards to students who have received prior learning assessment (PLA) credits prior to entering post-secondary institutions in B.C. Not surprisingly, a study conducted by the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (2002) found that PLA students across five institutions did not differ appreciably from non-PLA students in terms of academic performance based on GPAs. The conclusion was that prior learning assessment can be applied without compromising student success.

After taking a close look a transfer mechanisms across the country, Finlay (1997) concludes that "within Canada, BC is considered to be the province with the most integrated post-secondary system, and the best transfer environment" (p. 2). However, she cites studies indicating that 16% of academic students who attempted to transfer credits state that they experienced problems and 44% of transfer students reported a loss of credit upon transfer between institutions. Finlay concludes that good block transfer agreements can provide clear and equitable transitions for post-secondary students and reduce the administrative time necessary to assess transcripts and allocate credit.

This has certainly been the experience of the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria as it moved from reviewing transcripts for transfer on a course-to-course basis to a block transfer system. With the establishment of the Child and Youth Care Education Consortium, the efficiency became even greater. Bilateral transfer agreements now were replaced with multilateral ones. Rather than establishing separate transfer agreements with each of the three child and youth care degree programs in the province, colleges could now have a collaborative assessment done that resulted in a transfer agreement for the three receiving institutions. Agreements of this nature have been established between the Consortium and colleges throughout B.C. and in other provinces as well (see Appendix A). The administrative efficiency is considerable.

Of course, one of the limitations of block transfer credit is that it only applies to students who have completed a certificate or diploma from a college. Students with partial credit towards a credential will not be eligible for block transfer credit. In such instances it is necessary to revert to a course-by-course evaluation of the transcript.

Rather than being legislated (as is the case in some US instances) the B.C. approach to transfer credit is a more consultative one. However, the voluntary nature of the process has resulted in receiving institution having the balance of power in the transfer process and functioning in the role of 'gatekeepers.' Collegiality and trust are key factors in the system functioning effectively. This is particularly so with block transfer credit since the transcript evaluation is more global in nature and is predicated upon a trust in the integrity of the credential from the sending institution. A relationship of collaboration is necessary for the mechanism to function well. Further, when the block transfer structure operates in a multilateral fashion, as is the case with the Child and Youth Care Education Consortium, the factors of trust, collegiality, relationship and collaboration become even more pronounced.

As the post-secondary education system moves into operating within a new political context favoring 'competitive' and 'market-driven' environments it remains to be seen what the effects of these changes will be on the transfer system in BC. In a more competitive post-secondary environment, will there be less interest and activity in maintaining structures such as transfer credit that are based on a collaborative foundation? Hopefully not, but only time, and future research on prevailing patterns of transfer credit, will tell.

Acknowledgements

Appreciation is expressed to the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer for their continuing interest in block transfer credit and their specific support of this research project.

Thanks to Duane Seibel for his dedicated work in the early years of establishing a block transfer system in the School of Child and Youth Care at UVic as well as his more recent work in creating a transfer credit website for the Consortium.

Thanks to Cled Thomas, UVic Registrar, for his support of the initial block transfer initiative and its subsequent evaluation.

Thanks to John Rogerson who was instrumental in the collection of the Malaspina University College data for the project.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Homepage for the Child and Youth Care Education Consortium, located at the following URL:

http//www.cycec.bc.ca/

Appendix B:

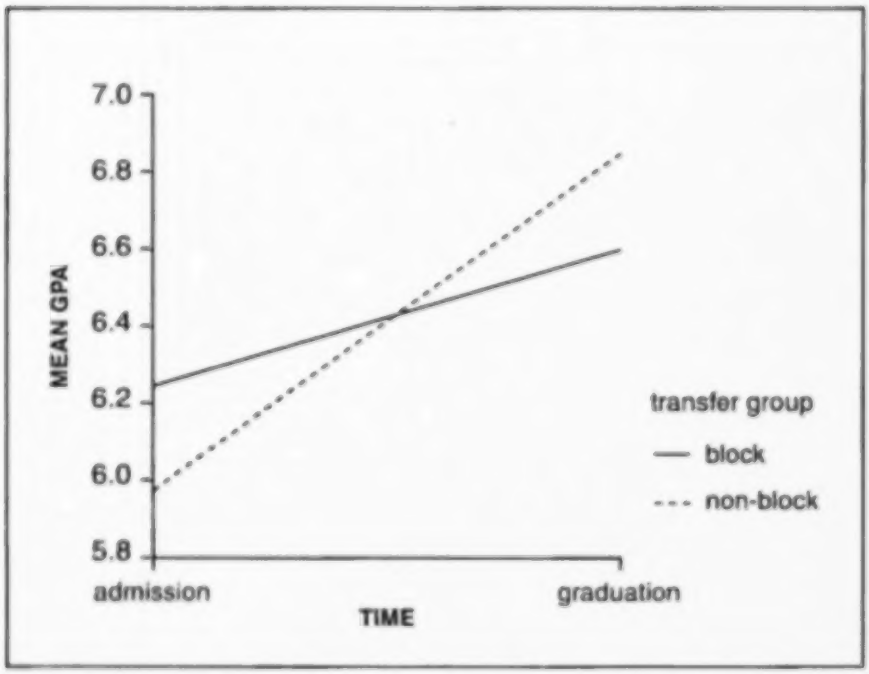
Figure 1. Mean GPA vs. time of block and non-block students at UVic.

Appendix C:

Figure 2. Mean GPA% scores vs. time for block students at MUC.

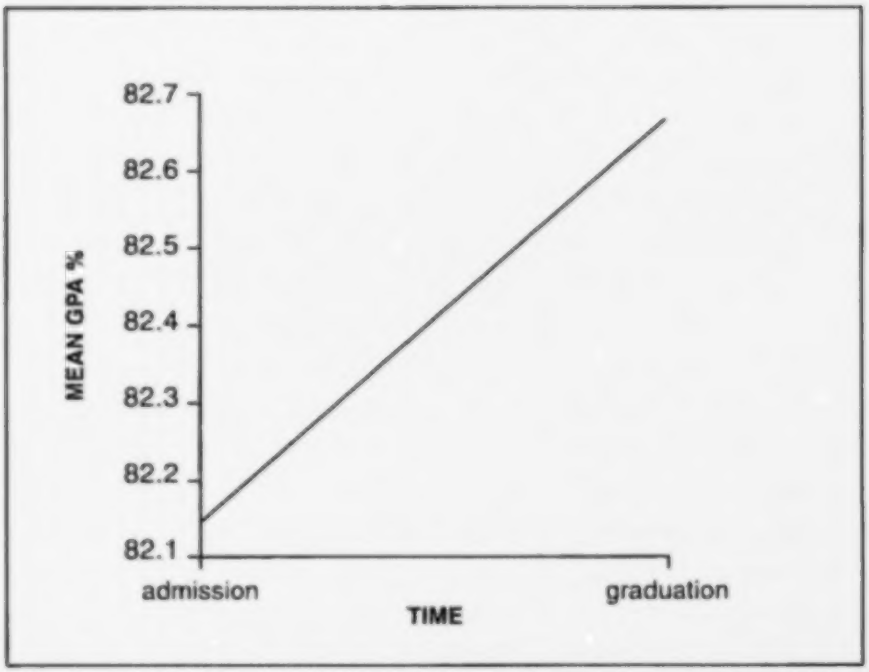
Appendix B

Figure 1. Mean GPA vs. time of block and non-block students at UVic



Appendix C

Figure 2. Mean GPA% scores vs. time for block students at MUC



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